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ABSTRACT

Concerns about college fraternities and sororities and student values are identified for student personnel administrators. It is noted that fraternities and sororities are exclusionary by practice, sexist in nature, and gender specific by design. They reinforce, without reexamining, the values that their members possess upon entering. Attention is directed to the role of higher education in determining the values of its students, the way that colleges and universities contradict their stated values dealing with the reality of the behavior of the fraternity and sorority life of today, and reasons that campuses should reflect the same values they explicitly profess. It is maintained that part of the job of student personnel officers is to transmit value messages to students. A second role is to develop morals as part of the overall development of students. It is also claimed that alcohol abuse, sexism, racism, destruction of property, and rape are kinds of problems that are more frequently associated with many of the fraternities and sororities of today. It is recommended that the student personnel profession take a stand against institutions such as social fraternities and sororities that do not reflect and engender the higher moral values of society. (SW)

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SOCIAL FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES ARE NOT CONDUCIVE TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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Resolved that Social Fraternities And Sororities Are Not Conducive To The Educational Process

Of the 2000 American and Canadian universities, about 920, or 46%, have Greek systems (Egan, 1985: p. 7). Over the last few years, headlines such as "New Look for the Thriving Greeks," "Return to Brotherhood," and "The Greeks are back on Campus," have appeared in The Chonicle of Higher Education and magazines such as Time and Newsweek. Does the resurgence reflect a growing conservatism among our college students? Or rather, does it reflect a desire on the part of college and university students to get "the best out of their College days"? Or does it reflect both of these trends? I want to focus on how we as Student Personnel Administrators should view the recent resurgence in light of the values we should be espousing and which our students seem to be expressing.

Fraternities and sororities are exclusionary by practice, sexist in nature, and gender specific by design. They reinforce, without reexamining, the values that their members possess upon entering.

I want to discuss the role of higher education in determining the values of its students, the way that we as colleges and universities contradict our stated values when dealing with the reality of the behavior of the

fraternity and sorority life of today, and the reasons that our campuses should reflect those same values that we explicity profess.

The first point on which we should agree is that part of our job as student personnel officers is to transmit appropriate value messages to our students. This view is widely accepted today. As Arthur Sandeen relates in his article "The Legacy of Values Education in College Student Personnel Work,"

> Whether values are taught formally in the curriculum or not, the attitude, conduct, and beliefs of students have always been influenced by their colleges. The specific organization of knowledge, the academic requirements set forth in the catalog, the manner in which the faculty relate to the students, the role accorded to out-of-class experiences, the emphasis given to policies and procedures, and the standards set for admission and graduation all reveal certain values of the college, and their expectations for values development in students" (Sandeen, 1985 p. 21

Clear support exists for our institutions' role in conveying values, thus importance must be given to the clarity of the message.

Current groups which are designing the educational efforts of the future also call for such ideals. Last year, the American Council on Education convened the Commission on National Challenges to Higher Education. The Commission s "Memorandum to the 41st President of the United States,

called for colleges and universities to "Help Restore Respect for Values and Ethical Behavior." According to the memorandum, "Colleges and universities should appreciate that the ways in which they create, explain, and enforce rules of conduct on campus afford opportunities to teach respect for such fundamental principles as telling the truth, honoring agreements, and respecting the rights of others...." (Harvard University Gazette, 1987: p. 4).

The second point on which I hope we agree is that the development of morals should be of primary importance to the overall development of our students. Alexander Astin, Jon Dalton, Douglas Heath, Arthur Levine, Arthur Sandeen and many others refer to the need for the profession to become explicitly and stridently involved in directing the moral development of our students. In 1982, Steven Mueller, president of Johns Hopkins University, stated that universities are turning out "highly skilled barbarians... ." He went on to say that the biggest downfall in higher education today is that college staff and faculty fail to expose students to values and "...don't provide a value framework to young people who more and more are searching for it" (Dalton, 1985: p. 21).

Similarly, the Plan for a New Century Committee, in its document, A Perspective on Student Affairs, puts forth a number of principles which are important here: 1) Each Person has Worth and Dignity, 2)Bigotry Cannot be Tolerated, 3) Feelings Affect Thinking and Learning, 4) Out-of-Class Environments Affect Learning, and 5) Effective Leadership Should be Taught (A Perspective on Student Affairs, 1987: pp. 10-13). These examples are prevalent throughout our current literature.

Following these guidelines, we attempt to convey our values in most material distributed to prospective students and their parents. We, as colleges and universities, talk about the high ideals of our institutions, about the fact that we admit students openly, without consideration of race, creed, and sex--some among us even include sexual orientation in our statements. In our admission's offices, we work very hard to model our mission statements. But, our position on fraternities and sororities sends mixed messages to our students.

Social fraternities and sororities are all too often antithetical to these values and, in fact, to the very essence of the roots of higher education, of a college and university system which began here in these United States with moral education as its guide. The motto of the first fraternity was "love of wisdom, the guide of life" (Bryan and Schwartz, 1983: p.1). When Greek organizations were founded, they ". . . challenged the thinking of their day and were concerned with social issues ignored by colleges and universities, provided students with outlets for debates, free discussions, and an arena to test new ideas" (Bryan, 1983: p. 38). It is difficult to find any consistant values fostered by today's fraternities and sororities that reinforce the original standards. Of course, even if the original standards still existed, the sexist and exclusionary practices would remain. At a later point in its material, the ACE's Commission Memorandum to the 41st President states, "Institutions should also set the highest possible example for students and faculty in making decisions on such issues as recruitment of minorities, and women, investment of endowments, and relations with their local communities" (Harvard University Gazette, 1987: p. 4).

In terms of educational goals, these organizations are equally out of line with our institutions' stated missions. To quote William Bryan in his article "Contemporary Fraternity and Sorority Issues," "Unfortunately, today these organizations are often the purveyors of the status quo reacting to issues rather than acting on issues for change" (Winston et al., 1987: p. 37). Most actions and values we abhor and profess to examine in intellectual and cultural ways on our campuses are part of the reality of fraternity and sorority life--in direct opposition to that to which we aspire. We proudly exhibit philosophies--in our view books, Admissions' statements, and programs and classes on racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression which have become, out of conviction, at the forefront of our concern in the last years, we educate, convey our values, and support higher ideals than those reflected in our nation today--and at the same time many of us expend staff, money and very precious time to the support and protection of fraternities and sororities. The messages to our students are very mixed.

Students need to be in environments which challenge them to think about values different from their own (Meyer, 1980: p. 56), to be placed in situations dissimilar from those with which they are familiar, and to associate with people who are different socially and culturally from themselves. Fraternities and sororities provide the opposite type of environment by promoting sexism, racism, and exclusionary practices. The studies which explore value development of college-aged students have found that the model campus environment is one which challenges and yet provides support. It is a campus that lives its written goals, that aspires toward the development of a moral individual. The fraternity and sorority environment rewards complacency, not challenging oneself, and it supports

the most inappropriate behavior, not finding ways to grow and develop in a complex society.

I think we should be able to agree on a third item as well. Not only are the principles of fraternities and sororities anathema to the principles we are trying to espouse, but alcohol abuse, sexism, racism, destruction of property, and rape are kinds of problems which are more frequently associated with many of the fraternities and sororities of today. They demand a constant investment of money and staff time to deal with the problems which emanate from behind their walls. Much effort is expended, and yet we are greeted by regular headlines in The Chronicle of Higher Education such as "Behavior of Students in Fraternities Worsens on Many Campuses, as Membership Soars," "Suspended Fraternity Guilty of Hazing," and " Fraternity Involved in Sex Assault." Most recently, the headline "Drinking Themselves to Death" appeared on the editorial page of the New York Times. The editorial referred to the death of a fraternity pledge as a result of an overdose of alcohol at a college fraternity party. It is certainly not the first time that we have read the headline. We all know that similar headlines could appear in our own campus papers. Many of us have experienced first hand the situation.

And the way we handle these problems also send mixed messages to our students. We know (as do our students) that when we suspend one fraternity from campus for inappropriate behavior, a number of others are exhibiting that same form of behavior, but have not been caught -mixed messages again.

Such behaviors as those described above would not be tolerated from any other group, in any other context. Imagine another of your college's or university's clubs or organizations compiling such a list of offenses, and being tolerated for more time than it would take to revoke the charter of the group and possibly suspend a student or two in the process.

The problems of fraternities and sororities as institutions are reflected in behavioral problems caused by their members as individuals, within groups. Yet too often we do not take stands of principle against behavior we view as abborrent, because it is tied to the Greek system. When we "suspend" one fraternity or sorority--or a student--for inappropriate behavior, the illusion is that we have taken care of the "problem." We have not. And we will not until we realize that the behavioral problem of fraternities and sororities are the manisfestation of a much larger problem. Their practices disregard our most fundamental values. The problems will not be solved by suspending one fraternity and/or sororitiy chapter, or by "working with them" so that they might experience the "educational benefit" of righting their wrongs. Fundamentally, because of the values that are inherent to their charters, fraternities and sororities no longer belong in our institutions of higher learning.

Now is the time for our profession to take a stand against institutions such as social fraternities and sororities that do not reflect and engender the higher moral values of our society, a time to condemn the abhorant behavior that plagues the reality of the fraternities and sororities of today.

Those colleges and universities among us that made the decision to remove recognition from fraternities and sororities did so with the knowledge of the true fraternity of today. At Colby, it was alumni fraternity members, who as members of the Trustee Commission that made the final decision, realized that the fraternity of yesterday that they knew and loved, was not the fraternity of today.

Now is the time to guide students in the pursuit of justice and caring, to help them seek the lessons in history and to apply them to the future, to advance their ability to "see" critically and to question the world around them so that they may be better able to live compassionately, and to nurture their ability to live in communities that are comprised of others who exhibit cultural and ideological differences, so that they may be better able to address the problems of our world.

Throughout our history, institutions of higher education have been at the forefront of, and the battleground for, some of our nation's most progressive steps toward a higher social and moral citizenry. It is the leaders of our institutions who have called for justice and fairness in the light of oppression. And it has been our faculties who have produced new research to confront the problems we now face and will continue to face in our future--the inability of the people of our world to live together peacefully, threatened water and food supplies, and moral and ethical dilemmas that will push us to the very limits of moral reasoning.

It is a time that we, as <u>the</u> adults at our colleges and universities who have the most influence on our students (Dalton, 1985: p.26) need to step

out from behind the value-neutrality which Dalton deplores. We need to take a stand about the fraternities and sororities on our campuses that threaten the further development of our students' values so that upon graduation, our students may better cope with the world in which they will soon make the decisions.

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